

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Edited by

MARILYN McCORD ADAMS

and

ROBERT MERRIHEW ADAMS

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

I

EVIL AND OMNIPOTENCE

J. L. MACKIE

The traditional arguments for the existence of God have been fairly thoroughly criticised by philosophers. But the theologian can, if he wishes, accept this criticism. He can admit that no rational proof of God's existence is possible. And he can still retain all that is essential to his position, by holding that God's existence is known in some other, non-rational way. I think, however, that a more telling criticism can be made by way of the traditional problem of evil. Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another, so that the theologian can maintain his position as a whole only by a much more extreme rejection of reason than in the former case. He must now be prepared to believe, not merely what cannot be proved, but what can be *disproved* from other beliefs that he also holds.

The problem of evil, in the sense in which I shall be using the phrase, is a problem only for someone who believes that there is a God who is both omnipotent and wholly good. And it is a logical problem, the problem of clarifying and reconciling a number of beliefs: it is not a scientific problem that might be solved by further observations, or a practical problem that might be solved by a decision or an action. These points are obvious; I mention them only because they are sometimes ignored by theologians, who sometimes parry a statement of the problem with such remarks as 'Well, can you solve the problem yourself?' or 'This is a mystery which may be revealed to us later' or 'Evil is something to be faced and overcome, not to be merely discussed'.

In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions: the theologian, it seems, at once *must* adhere and *cannot consistently* adhere to all three. (The problem does not arise only for

theists, but I shall discuss it in the form in which it presents itself for ordinary theism.)

However, the contradiction does not arise immediately; to show it we need some additional premises, or perhaps some quasi-logical rules connecting the terms 'good', 'evil', and 'omnipotent'. These additional principles are that good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. From these it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible.

A. ADEQUATE SOLUTIONS

Now once the problem is fully stated it is clear that it can be solved, in the sense that the problem will not arise if one gives up at least one of the propositions that constitute it. If you are prepared to say that God is not wholly good, or not quite omnipotent, or that evil does not exist, or that good is not opposed to the kind of evil that exists, or that there are limits to what an omnipotent thing can do, then the problem of evil will not arise for you.

There are, then, quite a number of adequate solutions of the problem of evil, and some of these have been adopted, or almost adopted, by various thinkers. For example, a few have been prepared to deny God's omnipotence, and rather more have been prepared to keep the term 'omnipotence' but severely to restrict its meaning, recording quite a number of things that an omnipotent being cannot do. Some have said that evil is an illusion, perhaps because they held that the whole world of temporal, changing things is an illusion, and that what we call evil belongs only to this world, or perhaps because they held that although temporal things *are* much as we see them, those that we call evil are not really evil. Some have said that what we call evil is merely the privation of good, that evil in a positive sense, evil that would really be opposed to good, does not exist. Many have agreed with Pope that disorder is harmony not understood, and that partial evil is universal good. Whether any of these views is *true* is, of course, another question. But each of them gives an adequate solution of the problem of evil in the sense that if you accept it this problem does not arise for you, though you may, of course, have *other* problems to face.

But often enough these adequate solutions are only *almost* adopted. The thinkers who restrict God's power, but keep the term 'omnipotence', may

reasonably be suspected of thinking, in other contexts, that his power is really unlimited. Those who say that evil is an illusion may also be thinking, inconsistently, that this illusion is itself an evil. Those who say that 'evil' is merely privation of good may also be thinking, inconsistently, that privation of good is an evil. (The fallacy here is akin to some forms of the 'naturalistic fallacy' in ethics, where some think, for example, that 'good' is just what contributes to evolutionary progress, and that evolutionary progress is itself good.) If Pope meant what he said in the first line of his couplet, that 'disorder' is only harmony not understood, the 'partial evil' of the second line must, for consistency, mean 'that which, taken in isolation, falsely appears to be evil', but it would more naturally mean 'that which, in isolation, really is evil'. The second line, in fact, hesitates between two views, that 'partial evil' isn't really evil, since only the universal quality is real, and that 'partial evil' is really an evil, but only a little one.

In addition, therefore, to adequate solutions, we must recognise unsatisfactory inconsistent solutions, in which there is only a half-hearted or temporary rejection of one of the propositions which together constitute the problem. In these, one of the constituent propositions is explicitly rejected, but it is covertly re-asserted or assumed elsewhere in the system.

B. FALLACIOUS SOLUTIONS

Besides these half-hearted solutions, which explicitly reject but implicitly assert one of the constituent propositions, there are definitely fallacious solutions which explicitly maintain all the constituent propositions, but implicitly reject at least one of them in the course of the argument that explains away the problem of evil.

There are, in fact, many so-called solutions which purport to remove the contradiction without abandoning any of its constituent propositions. These must be fallacious, as we can see from the very statement of the problem, but it is not so easy to see in each case precisely where the fallacy lies. I suggest that in all cases the fallacy has the general form suggested above: in order to solve the problem one (or perhaps more) of its constituent propositions is given up, but in such a way that it appears to have been retained, and can therefore be asserted without qualification in other contexts. Sometimes there is a further complication: the supposed solution moves to and fro between, say, two of the constituent propositions, at one point asserting the first of these but covertly abandoning the second, at another point asserting the second but covertly abandoning the first. These

fallacious solutions often turn upon some equivocation with the words 'good' and 'evil', or upon some vagueness about the way in which good and evil are opposed to one another, or about how much is meant by 'omnipotence'. I propose to examine some of these so-called solutions, and to exhibit their fallacies in detail. Incidentally, I shall also be considering whether an adequate solution could be reached by a minor modification of one or more of the constituent propositions, which would, however, still satisfy all the essential requirements of ordinary theism.

1. 'Good cannot exist without evil' or 'Evil is necessary as a counterpart to good.'

It is sometimes suggested that evil is necessary as a counterpart to good, that if there were no evil there could be no good either, and that this solves the problem of evil. It is true that it points to an answer to the question 'Why should there be evil?' But it does so only by qualifying some of the propositions that constitute the problem.

First, it sets a limit to what God can do, saying that God *cannot* create good without simultaneously creating evil, and this means either that God is not omnipotent or that there are *some* limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. It may be replied that these limits are always presupposed, that omnipotence has never meant the power to do what is logically impossible, and on the present view the existence of good without evil would be a logical impossibility. This interpretation of omnipotence may, indeed, be accepted as a modification of our original account which does not reject anything that is essential to theism, and I shall in general assume it in the subsequent discussion. It is, perhaps, the most common theistic view, but I think that some theists at least have maintained that God can do what is logically impossible. Many theists, at any rate, have held that logic itself is created or laid down by God, that logic is the way in which God arbitrarily chooses to think. (This is, of course, parallel to the ethical view that morally right actions are those which God arbitrarily chooses to command, and the two views encounter similar difficulties.) And *this* account of logic is clearly inconsistent with the view that God is bound by logical necessities—unless it is possible for an omnipotent being to bind himself, an issue which we shall consider later, when we come to the Paradox of Omnipotence. This solution of the problem of evil cannot, therefore, be consistently adopted along with the view that logic is self created by God.

But, secondly, this solution denies that evil is opposed to good in our original sense. If good and evil are counterparts, a good thing will not 'eliminate evil as far as it can'. Indeed, this view suggests that good and evil

are not strictly qualities of things at all. Perhaps the suggestion is that good and evil are related in much the same way as great and small. Certainly, when the term 'great' is used relatively as a condensation of 'greater than so-and-so', and 'small' is used correspondingly, greatness and smallness are counterparts and cannot exist without each other. But in this sense greatness is not a quality, not an intrinsic feature of anything; and it would be absurd to think of a movement in favour of greatness and against smallness in this sense. Such a movement would be self-defeating, since relative greatness can be promoted only by a simultaneous promotion of relative smallness. I feel sure that no theists would be content to regard God's goodness as analogous to this—as if what he supports were not the *good* but the *better*, and as if he had the paradoxical aim that all things should be better than other things.

This point is obscured by the fact that 'great' and 'small' seem to have an absolute as well as a relative sense. I cannot discuss here whether there is absolute magnitude or not, but if there is, there could be an absolute sense for 'great', it could mean of at least a certain size, and it would make sense to speak of all things getting bigger, of a universe that was expanding all over, and therefore it would make sense to speak of promoting greatness. But in *this* sense great and small are not logically necessary counterparts: either quality could exist without the other. There would be no logical impossibility in everything's being small or in everything's being great.

Neither in the absolute nor in the relative sense, then, of 'great' and 'small' do these terms provide an analogy of the sort that would be needed to support this solution of the problem of evil. In neither case are greatness and smallness *both* necessary counterparts *and* mutually opposed forces or possible objects for support and attack.

It may be replied that good and evil are necessary counterparts in the same way as any quality and its logical opposite: redness can occur, it is suggested, only if non-redness also occurs. But unless evil is merely the privation of good, they are not logical opposites, and some further argument would be needed to show that they are counterparts in the same way as genuine logical opposites. Let us assume that this could be given. There is still doubt of the correctness of the metaphysical principle that a quality must have a real opposite: I suggest that it is not really impossible that everything should be, say, red, that the truth is merely that if everything were red we should not notice redness, and so we should have no word 'red'; we observe and give names to qualities only if they have real opposites. If so, the principle that a term must have an opposite would belong only to our language or to our thought, and would not be an ontological principle, and, correspondingly, the rule that good cannot exist

without evil would not state a logical necessity of a sort that God would just have to put up with. God might have made everything good, though we should not have noticed it if he had.

But, finally, even if we concede that this is an ontological principle, it will provide a solution for the problem of evil only if one is prepared to say, 'Evil exists, but only just enough evil to serve as the counterpart of good.' I doubt whether any theist will accept this. After all, the *ontological* requirement that non-redness should occur would be satisfied even if all the universe, except for a minute speck, were red, and, if there were a corresponding requirement for evil as a counterpart to good, a minute dose of evil would presumably do. But theists are not usually willing to say, in all contexts, that all the evil that occurs is a minute and necessary dose.

2. 'Evil is necessary as a means to good.'

It is sometimes suggested that evil is necessary for good not as a counterpart but as a means. In its simple form this has little plausibility as a solution of the problem of evil, since it obviously implies a severe restriction of God's power. It would be a *causal* law that you cannot have a certain end without a certain means, so that if God has to introduce evil as a means to good, he must be subject to at least some causal laws. This certainly conflicts with what a theist normally means by omnipotence. This view of God as limited by causal laws also conflicts with the view that causal laws are themselves made by God, which is more widely held than the corresponding view about the laws of logic. This conflict would, indeed, be resolved if it were possible for an omnipotent being to bind himself, and this possibility has still to be considered. Unless a favourable answer can be given to this question, the suggestion that evil is necessary as a means to good solves the problem of evil only by denying one of its constituent propositions, either that God is omnipotent or that 'omnipotent' means what it says.

3. 'The universe is better with some evil in it than it could be if there were no evil.'

Much more important is a solution which at first seems to be a mere variant of the previous one, that evil may contribute to the goodness of a whole in which it is found, so that the universe as a whole is better as it is, with some evil in it, than it would be if there were no evil. This solution may be developed in either of two ways. It may be supported by an aesthetic analogy, by the fact that contrasts heighten beauty, that in a musical work, for example, there may occur discords which somehow add to the beauty of the work as a whole. Alternatively, it may be worked out in connexion with the notion of progress, that the best possible organisations of the universe

will not be static, but progressive, that the gradual overcoming of evil by good is really a finer thing than would be the eternal unchallenged supremacy of good.

In either case, this solution usually starts from the assumption that the evil whose existence gives rise to the problem of evil is primarily what is called physical evil, that is to say, pain. In Hume's rather half-hearted presentation of the problem of evil, the evils that he stresses are pain and disease, and those who reply to him argue that the existence of pain and disease makes possible the existence of sympathy, benevolence, heroism, and the gradually successful struggle of doctors and reformers to overcome these evils. In fact, theists often seize the opportunity to accuse those who stress the problem of evil of taking a low, materialistic view of good and evil, equating these with pleasure and pain, and of ignoring the more spiritual goods which can arise in the struggle against evils.

But let us see exactly what is being done here. Let us call pain and misery 'first order evil' or 'evil (1)'. What contrasts with this, namely, pleasure and happiness, will be called 'first order good' or 'good (1)'. Distinct from this is 'second order good' or 'good (2)' which somehow emerges in a complex situation in which evil (1) is a necessary component—logically, not merely causally, necessary. (Exactly *how* it emerges does not matter: in the crudest version of this solution good (2) is simply the heightening of happiness by the contrast with misery, in other versions it includes sympathy with suffering, heroism in facing danger, and the gradual decrease of first order evil and increase of first order good.) It is also being assumed that second order good is more important than first order good or evil, in particular that it more than outweighs the first order evil it involves.

Now this is a particularly subtle attempt to solve the problem of evil. It defends God's goodness and omnipotence on the ground that (on a sufficiently long view) this is the best of all logically possible worlds, because it includes the important second order goods, and yet it admits that real evils, namely first order evils, exist. But does it still hold that good and evil are opposed? Not, clearly, in the sense that we set out originally: good does not tend to eliminate evil in general. Instead, we have a modified, a more complex pattern. First order good (*e.g.* happiness) *contrasts with* first order evil (*e.g.* misery): these two are opposed in a fairly mechanical way; some second order goods (*e.g.* benevolence) try to maximise first order good and minimise first order evil; but God's goodness is not this, it is rather the will to maximise *second* order good. We might, therefore, call God's goodness an example of a third order goodness, or good (3). While this account is different from our original one, it might well be held to be an improvement on it, to give a more accurate description of the way in which

good is opposed to evil, and to be consistent with the essential theist position.

There might, however, be several objections to this solution.

First, some might argue that such qualities as benevolence—and *a fortiori* the third order goodness which promotes benevolence—have a merely derivative value, that they are not higher sorts of good, but merely means to good (1), that is, to happiness, so that it would be absurd for God to keep misery in existence in order to make possible the virtues of benevolence, heroism, etc. The theist who adopts the present solution must, of course, deny this, but he can do so with some plausibility, so I should not press this objection.

Secondly, it follows from this solution that God is not in our sense benevolent or sympathetic: he is not concerned to minimise evil (1), but only to promote good (2); and this might be a disturbing conclusion for some theists.

But, thirdly, the fatal objection is this. Our analysis shows clearly the possibility of the existence of a *second* order evil, an evil (2) contrasting with good (2) as evil (1) contrasts with good (1). This would include malevolence, cruelty, callousness, cowardice, and states in which good (1) is decreasing and evil (1) increasing. And just as good (2) is held to be the important kind of good, the kind that God is concerned to promote, so evil (2) will, by analogy, be the important kind of evil, the kind which God, if he were wholly good and omnipotent, would eliminate. And yet evil (2) plainly exists, and indeed most theists (in other contexts) stress its existence more than that of evil (1). We should, therefore, state the problem of evil in terms of second order evil, and against this form of the problem the present solution is useless.

An attempt might be made to use this solution again, at a higher level, to explain the occurrence of evil (2): indeed the next main solution that we shall examine does just this, with the help of some new notions. Without any fresh notions, such a solution would have little plausibility: for example, we could hardly say that the really important good was a good (3), such as the increase of benevolence in proportion to cruelty, which logically required for its occurrence the occurrence of some second order evil. But even if evil (2) could be explained in this way, it is fairly clear that there would be third order evils contrasting with this third order good: and we should be well on the way to an infinite regress, where the solution of a problem of evil, stated in terms of evil (n), indicated the existence of an evil ($n+1$), and a further problem to be solved.

4. 'Evil is due to human freewill.'

Perhaps the most important proposed solution of the problem of evil is that evil is not to be ascribed to God at all, but to the independent actions of human beings, supposed to have been endowed by God with freedom of the will. This solution may be combined with the preceding one: first order evil (*e.g.* pain) may be justified as a logically necessary component in second order good (*e.g.* sympathy) while second order evil (*e.g.* cruelty) is not *justified*, but is so ascribed to human beings that God cannot be held responsible for it. This combination evades my third criticism of the preceding solution.

The freewill solution also involves the preceding solution at a higher level. To explain why a wholly good God gave men freewill although it would lead to some important evils, it must be argued that it is better on the whole that men should act freely, and sometimes err, than that they should be innocent automata, acting rightly in a wholly determined way. Freedom, that is to say, is now treated as a third order good, and as being more valuable than second order goods (such as sympathy and heroism) would be if they were deterministically produced, and it is being assumed that second order evils, such as cruelty, are logically necessary accompaniments of freedom, just as pain is a logically necessary pre-condition of sympathy.

I think that this solution is unsatisfactory primarily because of the incoherence of the notion of freedom of the will: but I cannot discuss this topic adequately here, although some of my criticisms will touch upon it.

First I should query the assumption that second order evils are logically necessary accompaniments of freedom. I should ask this: if God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several, occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong: there was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. Clearly, his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good.

If it is replied that this objection is absurd, that the making of some wrong choices is logically necessary for freedom, it would seem that 'freedom' must here mean complete randomness or indeterminacy, including randomness with regard to the alternatives good and evil, in other words that men's choices and consequent actions can be 'free' only if they are not determined

by their characters. Only on this assumption can God escape the responsibility for men's actions; for if he made them as they are, but did not determine their wrong choices, this can only be because the wrong choices are not determined by men as they are. But then if freedom is randomness, how can it be a characteristic of *will*? And, still more, how can it be the most important good? What value or merit would there be in free choices if these were random actions which were not determined by the nature of the agent?

I conclude that to make this solution plausible two different senses of 'freedom' must be confused, one sense which will justify the view that freedom is a third order good, more valuable than other goods would be without it, and another sense, sheer randomness, to prevent us from ascribing to God a decision to make men such that they sometimes go wrong when he might have made them such that they would always freely go right.

This criticism is sufficient to dispose of this solution. But besides this there is a fundamental difficulty in the notion of an omnipotent God creating men with free will, for if men's wills are really free this must mean that even God cannot control them, that is, that God is no longer omnipotent. It may be objected that God's gift of freedom to men does not mean that he *cannot* control their wills, but that he always *refrains* from controlling their wills. But why, we may ask, should God refrain from controlling evil wills? Why should he not leave men free to will rightly, but intervene when he sees them beginning to will wrongly? If God could do this, but does not, and if he is wholly good, the only explanation could be that even a wrong free act of will is not really evil, that its freedom is a value which outweighs its wrongness, so that there would be a loss of value if God took away the wrongness and the freedom together. But this is utterly opposed to what theists say about sin in other contexts. The present solution of the problem of evil, then, can be maintained only in the form that God has made men so free that he *cannot* control their wills.

This leads us to what I call the Paradox of Omnipotence: can an omnipotent being make things which he cannot subsequently control? Or, what is practically equivalent to this, can an omnipotent being make rules which then bind himself? (These are practically equivalent because any such rules could be regarded as setting certain things beyond his control, and *vice versa*.) The second of these formulations is relevant to the suggestions that we have already met, that an omnipotent God creates the rules of logic or causal laws, and is then bound by them.

It is clear that this is a paradox: the questions cannot be answered satisfactorily either in the affirmative or in the negative. If we answer 'Yes',

it follows that if God actually makes things which he cannot control, or makes rules which bind himself, he is not omnipotent once he has made them: there are *then* things which he cannot do. But if we answer 'No', we are immediately asserting that there are things which he cannot do, that is to say that he is already not omnipotent.

It cannot be replied that the question which sets this paradox is not a proper question. It would make perfectly good sense to say that a human mechanic has made a machine which he cannot control: if there is any difficulty about the question it lies in the notion of omnipotence itself.

This, incidentally, shows that although we have approached this paradox from the free will theory, it is equally a problem for a theological determinist. No one thinks that machines have free will, yet they may well be beyond the control of their makers. The determinist might reply that anyone who makes anything determines its ways of acting, and so determines its subsequent behaviour: even the human mechanic does this by his *choice* of materials and structure for his machine, though he does not know all about either of these: the mechanic thus determines, though he may not foresee, his machine's actions. And since God is omniscient, and since his creation of things is total, he both determines and foresees the ways in which his creatures will act. We may grant this, but it is beside the point. The question is not whether God *originally* determined the future actions of his creatures, but whether he can *subsequently* control their actions, or whether he was able in his original creation to put things beyond his subsequent control. Even on determinist principles the answers 'Yes' and 'No' are equally irreconcilable with God's omnipotence.

Before suggesting a solution of this paradox, I would point out that there is a parallel Paradox of Sovereignty. Can a legal sovereign make a law restricting its own future legislative power? For example, could the British parliament make a law forbidding any future parliament to socialise banking, and also forbidding the future repeal of this law itself? Or could the British parliament, which was legally sovereign in Australia in, say, 1899, pass a valid law, or series of laws, which made it no longer sovereign in 1933? Again, neither the affirmative nor the negative answer is really satisfactory. If we were to answer 'Yes', we should be admitting the validity of a law which, if it were actually made, would mean that parliament was no longer sovereign. If we were to answer 'No', we should be admitting that there is a law, not logically absurd, which parliament cannot validly make, that is, that parliament is not now a legal sovereign. This paradox can be solved in the following way. We should distinguish between first order laws, that is laws governing the actions of individuals and bodies other than the legislature, and second order laws, that is laws about laws, laws governing

the actions of the legislature itself. Correspondingly, we should distinguish two orders of sovereignty, first order sovereignty (sovereignty (1)) which is unlimited authority to make first order laws, and second order sovereignty (sovereignty (2)) which is unlimited authority to make second order laws. If we say that parliament is sovereign we might mean that any parliament at any time has sovereignty (1), or we might mean that parliament has both sovereignty (1) and sovereignty (2) at present, but we cannot without contradiction mean both that the present parliament has sovereignty (2) and that every parliament at every time has sovereignty (1), for if the present parliament has sovereignty (2) it may use it to take away the sovereignty (1) of later parliaments. What the paradox shows is that we cannot ascribe to any continuing institution legal sovereignty in an inclusive sense.

The analogy between omnipotence and sovereignty shows that the paradox of omnipotence can be solved in a similar way. We must distinguish between first order omnipotence (omnipotence (1)), that is unlimited power to act, and second order omnipotence (omnipotence (2)), that is unlimited power to determine what powers to act things shall have. Then we could consistently say that God all the time has omnipotence (1), but if so no beings at any time have powers to act independently of God. Or we could say that God at one time had omnipotence (2), and used it to assign independent powers to act to certain things, so that God thereafter did not have omnipotence (1). But what the paradox shows is that we cannot consistently ascribe to any continuing being omnipotence in an inclusive sense.

An alternative solution of this paradox would be simply to deny that God is a continuing being, that any times can be assigned to his actions at all. But on this assumption (which also has difficulties of its own) no meaning can be given to the assertion that God made men with wills so free that he could not control them. The paradox of omnipotence can be avoided by putting God outside time, but the freewill solution of the problem of evil cannot be saved in this way, and equally it remains impossible to hold that an omnipotent God *binds himself* by causal or logical laws.

CONCLUSION

Of the proposed solutions of the problem of evil which we have examined, none has stood up to criticism. There may be other solutions which require examination, but this study strongly suggests that there is no valid solution

of the problem which does not modify at least one of the constituent propositions in a way which would seriously affect the essential core of the theistic position.

Quite apart from the problem of evil, the paradox of omnipotence has shown that God's omnipotence must in any case be restricted in one way or another, that unqualified omnipotence cannot be ascribed to any being that continues through time. And if God and his actions are not in time, can omnipotence, or power of any sort, be meaningfully ascribed to him?

II

HUME ON EVIL

NELSON PIKE

In Parts X and XI of the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Hume sets forth his views on the traditional theological problem of evil. Hume's remarks on this topic seem to me to contain a rich mixture of insight and oversight. It will be my purpose in this paper to disentangle these contrasting elements of his discussion.¹

PHILO'S FIRST POSITION

(1) God, according to the traditional Christian view put forward by Cleanthes in the *Dialogues*, is all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good. And it is clear that for Cleanthes, the terms 'powerful', 'knowing', and 'good' apply to God in exactly the same sense in which these terms apply to men. Philo argues as follows (pp. 61-9): If God is to be all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good (using all key terms in their ordinary sense), then to claim that God exists is to preclude the possibility of admitting that there occur instances of evil; that is, is to preclude the possibility of admitting that there occur instances of suffering, pain, superstition, wickedness, and so forth.² The statements 'God exists' and 'There occur instances of suffering' are logically incompatible. Of course, no one could deny that there occur instances of suffering. Such a denial would

Nelson Pike, 'Hume on Evil', first published in *The Philosophical Review*, 72 (1963), pp. 180-97. Reprinted by permission of the Managing Editor and the author.

¹ All references to Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* will be to the Hafner Library of Classics edition, ed. by H. D. Aiken (New York, 1955).

² It is clear that, for Philo, the term 'evil' is used simply as a tag for the class containing all instances of suffering, pain, and so on. Philo offers no analysis of 'evil' nor does his challenge to Cleanthes rest in the least on the particularities of the logic of this term. On p. 69, e.g., Philo formulates his challenge to Cleanthes without using 'evil'. Here he speaks only of *misery*. In what is to follow, I shall (following Hume) make little use of 'evil'. Also, I shall use 'suffering' as short for 'suffering, pain, superstition, wickedness, and so on'.

plainly conflict with common experience.³ Thus it follows from obvious fact that God (having the attributes assigned to him by Cleanthes) does not exist.

This argument against the existence of God has enjoyed considerable popularity since Hume wrote the *Dialogues*. Concerning the traditional theological problem of evil, F. H. Bradley comments as follows:

The trouble has come from the idea that the Absolute is a moral person. If you start from that basis, then the relation of evil to the Absolute presents at once an irreducible dilemma. The problem then becomes insoluble, but not because it is obscure or in any way mysterious. To any one who has the sense and courage to see things as they are, and is resolved not to mystify others or himself, *there is really no question to discuss. The dilemma is plainly insoluble because it is based on a clear self-contradiction.*⁴

John Stuart Mill,⁵ J. E. McTaggart,⁶ Antony Flew,⁷ H. D. Aiken,⁸ J. L. Mackie,⁹ C. J. Ducasse,¹⁰ and H. J. McCloskey¹¹ are but a very few of the many others who have echoed Philo's finalistic dismissal of traditional theism after making reference to the logical incompatibility of 'God exists' and 'There occur instances of suffering'. W. T. Stace refers to Hume's discussion of the matter as follows:

(Assuming that 'good' and 'powerful' are used in theology as they are used in ordinary discourse), we have to say that Hume was right. The charge has never been answered and never will be. The simultaneous attribution of all-power and all-goodness to the Creator of the whole world is logically incompatible with the existence of evil and pain in the world, for which reason the conception of a finite God, who is not all-powerful . . . has become popular in some quarters.¹²

In the first and second sections of this paper, I shall argue that the argument against the existence of God presented in Part X of the *Dialogues* is quite unconvincing. It is not at all clear that 'God exists' and 'There occur instances of suffering' are logically incompatible statements.

(2) Moving now to the details of the matter, we may, I think, formulate Philo's first challenge to Cleanthes as follows:

³ Had Philo been dealing with 'evil' (defined in some special way) instead of 'suffering', this move in the argument might not have been open to him.

⁴ *Appearance and Reality* (Oxford, 1930), 174. Italics mine.

⁵ *Theism* (New York, 1957), 40. See also *The Utility of Religion* (New York, 1957), 73 ff.

⁶ *Some Dogmas of Religion* (London, 1906), 212–13.

⁷ 'Theology and Falsification', in Flew and MacIntyre (eds.), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York, 1955), 108.

⁸ 'God and Evil: Some Relations between Faith and Morals', *Ethics*, 68 (1958), 77–97.

⁹ 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind*, 64 (1955), 201 [Chapter 1, p. 26, in this collection].

¹⁰ *A Philosophical Scrutiny of Religion* (New York, 1953), ch. 16.

¹¹ 'God and Evil', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 10 (1960), 97–114.

¹² *Time and Eternity* (Princeton, 1952), 56.

- (1) The world contains instances of suffering.
- (2) God exists—and is omnipotent and omniscient.
- (3) God exists—and is perfectly good.

According to the view advanced by Philo, these three statements constitute an 'inconsistent triad' (p. 66). Any two of them might be held together. But if any two of them are endorsed, the third must be denied. Philo argues that to say of God that he is omnipotent and omniscient is to say that he *could* prevent suffering if he wanted to. Unless God could prevent suffering, he would not qualify as both omnipotent and omniscient. But, Philo continues, to say of God that he is perfectly good is to say that God *would* prevent suffering if he could. A being who would not prevent suffering when it was within his power to do so would not qualify as perfectly good. Thus, to affirm propositions (2) and (3) is to affirm the existence of a being who both could prevent suffering if he wanted to and who would prevent suffering if he could. This, of course, is to deny the truth of proposition (1). By similar reasoning, Philo would insist, to affirm (1) and (2) is to deny the truth of (3). And to affirm (1) and (3) is to deny the truth of (2). But, as conceived by Cleanthes, God is both omnipotent-omniscient and perfectly good. Thus, as understood by Cleanthes, 'God exists' and 'There occur instances of suffering' are logically incompatible statements. Since the latter of these statements is obviously true, the former must be false. Philo reflects: 'Nothing can shake the solidarity of this reasoning, so short, so clear (and) so decisive' (p. 69).

It seems to me that this argument is deficient. I do not think it follows from the claim that a being is perfectly good that he would prevent suffering if he could.

Consider this case. A parent forces a child to take a spoonful of bitter medicine. The parent thus brings about an instance of discomfort—suffering. The parent could have refrained from administering the medicine; and he knew that the child would suffer discomfort if he did administer it. Yet, when we are assured that the parent acted in the interest of the child's health and happiness, the fact that he knowingly caused discomfort is not sufficient to remove the parent from the class of perfectly good beings. If the parent fails to fit into this class, it is not because he caused *this* instance of suffering.

Given only that the parent knowingly caused an instance of discomfort, we are tempted to *blame* him for his action—that is, to exclude him from the class of perfectly good beings. But when the full circumstances are known, blame becomes inappropriate. In this case, there is what I shall call a 'morally sufficient reason' for the parent's action. To say that there is a

morally sufficient reason for his action is simply to say that there is a circumstance or condition which, when known, renders *blame* (though, of course, not *responsibility*) for the action inappropriate. As a general statement, a being who permits (or brings about) an instance of suffering might be perfectly good providing only that there is a morally sufficient reason for his action. Thus, it does not follow from the claim that God is perfectly good that he would prevent suffering if he could. God might fail to prevent suffering, or himself bring about suffering, while remaining perfectly good. It is required only that there be a morally sufficient reason for his action.

(3) In the light of these reflections, let us now attempt to put Philo's challenge to Cleanthes in sharper form.

- (4) The world contains instances of suffering.
- (5) God exists—and is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good.
- (6) An omnipotent and omniscient being would have no morally sufficient reason for allowing instances of suffering.

Unlike the first, this sequence is logically tight. Suppose (6) and (4) true. If an omnipotent and omniscient being would have no morally sufficient reason for allowing instances of suffering, then, in a world containing such instances, either there would be no omnipotent and omniscient being or that being would be blameworthy. On either of these last alternatives, proposition (5) would be false. Thus, if (6) and (4) are true, (5) must be false. In similar fashion, suppose (6) and (5) true. If an omnipotent and omniscient being would have no morally sufficient reason for allowing suffering, then, if there existed an omnipotent and omniscient being who was also perfectly good, there would occur no suffering. Thus, if (6) and (5) are true, (4) must be false. Lastly, suppose (5) and (4) true. If there existed an omnipotent and omniscient being who was also perfectly good, then if there occurred suffering, the omnipotent and omniscient being (being also perfectly good) would have to have a morally sufficient reason for permitting it. Thus, if (5) and (4) are true, (6) must be false.

Now, according to Philo (and all others concerned), proposition (4) is surely true. And proposition (6)—well, what about proposition (6)? At this point, two observations are needed.

First, it would not serve Philo's purpose were he to argue the truth of proposition (6) by enumerating a number of reasons for permitting suffering (which might be assigned to an omnipotent and omniscient being) and then by showing that in each case the reason offered is not a morally sufficient reason (when assigned to an omnipotent and omniscient being). Philo could never claim to have examined all of the possibilities. And at any given

point in the argument, Cleanthes could always claim that God's reason for permitting suffering is one which Philo has not yet considered. A retreat to unexamined reasons would remain open to Cleanthes regardless of how complete the list of examined reasons seemed to be.

Second, the position held by Philo in Part X of the *Dialogues* demands that he affirm proposition (6) as a *necessary truth*. If this is not already clear, consider the following inconsistent triad.

- (7) All swans are white.
- (8) Some swans are not large.
- (9) All white things are large.

Suppose (9) true, but not necessarily true. Either (7) or (8) must be false. But the conjunction of (7) and (8) is not contradictory. If the conjunction of (7) and (8) were contradictory, then (9) would be a necessary truth. Thus, unless (9) is a necessary truth, the conjunction of (7) and (8) is not contradictory. Note what happens to this antilogism when 'colored' is substituted for 'large'. Now (9) becomes a necessary truth and, correspondingly, (7) and (8) become logically incompatible. The same holds for the inconsistent triad we are now considering. As already discovered, Philo holds that 'There are instances of suffering' (proposition 4) and 'God exists' (proposition 5) are logically incompatible. But (4) and (5) will be logically incompatible only if (6) is a necessary truth. Thus, if Philo is to argue that (4) and (5) are logically incompatible, he must be prepared to affirm (6) as a necessary truth.

We may now reconstitute Philo's challenge to the position held by Cleanthes.

Proposition (4) is obviously true. No one could deny that there occur instances of suffering. But proposition (6) is a necessary truth. An omnipotent and omniscient being would have no morally sufficient reason for allowing instances of suffering—just as a bachelor would have no wife. Thus, there exists no being who is, at once, omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good. Proposition (5) must be false.

(4) This is a formidable challenge to Cleanthes' position. Its strength can best be exposed by reflecting on some of the circumstances or conditions which, in ordinary life, and with respect to ordinary agents, are usually counted as morally sufficient reasons for failing to prevent (or relieve) some given instance of suffering. Let me list five such reasons.

First, consider an agent who lacked physical ability to prevent some instance of suffering. Such an agent could claim to have had a morally sufficient reason for not preventing the instance in question.

Second, consider an agent who lacked knowledge of (or the means of

knowing about) a given instance of suffering. Such an agent could claim to have had a morally sufficient reason for not preventing the suffering, even if (on all other counts) he had the ability to prevent it.

Third, consider an agent who knew of an instance of suffering and had the physical ability to prevent it, but did not *realize* that he had this ability. Such an agent could usually claim to have had a morally sufficient reason for not preventing the suffering. Example: if I push the button on the wall, the torment of the man in the next room will cease. I have the physical ability to push the button. I know that the man in the next room is in pain. But I do not know that pushing the button will relieve the torment. I do not push the button and thus do not relieve the suffering.

Fourth, consider an agent who had the ability to prevent an instance of suffering, knew of the suffering, knew that he had the ability to prevent it, but did not prevent it because he believed (rightly or wrongly) that to do so would be to fail to effect some future good which would outweigh the negative value of the suffering. Such an agent might well claim to have had a morally sufficient reason for not preventing the suffering. Example: go back to the case of the parent causing discomfort by administering bitter medicine to the child.

Fifth, consider an agent who had the ability to prevent an instance of suffering, knew of the suffering, knew that he had the ability to prevent it, but failed to prevent it because to do so would have involved his preventing a prior good which outweighed the negative value of the suffering. Such an agent might claim to have had a morally sufficient reason for not preventing the suffering. Example: a parent permits a child to eat some birthday cake knowing that his eating the cake will result in the child's feeling slightly ill later in the day. The parent estimates that the child's pleasure of the moment outweighs the discomfort which will result.

Up to this point, Philo would insist, we have not hit on a circumstance or condition which could be used by Cleanthes when constructing a 'theodicy', that is, when attempting to identify the morally sufficient reason God has for permitting instances of suffering.

The first three entries on the list are obviously not available. Each makes explicit mention of some lack of knowledge or power on the part of the agent. Nothing more need be said about them.

A theologian might, however, be tempted to use a reason of the fourth type when constructing a theodicy. He might propose that suffering *results in goods* which outweigh the negative value of the suffering. Famine (hunger) leads man to industry and progress. Disease (pain) leads man to knowledge and understanding. Philo suggests that no theodicy of this kind can be successful (pp. 73-4 and 76). An omnipotent and omniscient being

could find other means of bringing about the same results. The mere fact that evils give rise to goods cannot serve as a morally sufficient reason for an omnipotent and omniscient being to permit suffering.

A theologian might also be tempted to use reasons of the fifth type when constructing a theodicy. He might propose that instances of suffering *result from goods* which outweigh the negative value of the suffering. That the world is run in accordance with natural law is good. But any such regular operation will result in suffering. That men have the ability to make free choices is good. But free choice will sometimes result in wrong choice and suffering. Philo argues that it is not at all clear that a world run in accordance with natural law is better than one not so regulated (p. 74). And one might issue a similar challenge with respect to free will. But a more general argument has been offered in the contemporary literature on evil which is exactly analogous to the one suggested by Philo above. According to H. J. McCloskey, an omnipotent and omniscient being could devise a law-governed world which would not include suffering.¹³ And according to J. L. Mackie, an omnipotent and omniscient being could create a world containing free agents which would include no suffering or wrong-doing.¹⁴ The import of both of these suggestions is that an omnipotent and omniscient being could create a world containing whatever is good (regularity, free will, and so on) without allowing the suffering which (only factually) results from these goods. The mere fact that suffering results from good cannot serve as a morally sufficient reason for an omnipotent and omniscient being to allow suffering.

Though the above reflections may be far from conclusive, let us grant that, of the morally sufficient reasons so far considered, none could be assigned to an omnipotent and omniscient being. This, of course, is not to say that proposition (6) is true—let alone necessarily true. As mentioned earlier, proposition (6) will not be shown true by an enumerative procedure of the above kind. But consider the matter less rigorously. If none of the reasons so far considered could be assigned to an omnipotent and omniscient being, ought this not to raise a suspicion? Might there not be a principle operating in each of these reasons which guarantees that *no* morally sufficient reason for permitting suffering *could* be assigned to an omnipotent and omniscient being? Such a principle immediately suggests itself. Men are sometimes excused for allowing suffering. But in these cases, men are excused only because they lack the knowledge or power to prevent suffering, or because they lack the knowledge or power to bring about goods (which are causally related to suffering) without also bringing about

¹³ 'God and Evil', pp. 103-4.

¹⁴ 'Evil and Omnipotence', pp. 208-10 [pp. 33-4 above].

suffering. In other words, men are excusable only because they are limited. Having a morally sufficient reason for permitting suffering *entails* having some lack of knowledge or power. If this principle is sound (and, indeed, it is initially plausible) then proposition (6) must surely be listed as a necessary truth.

DEMEA'S THEODICY

But the issue is not yet decided. Demea has offered a theodicy which does not fit any of the forms outlined above. And Philo must be willing to consider all proposals if he is to claim 'decisiveness' for his argument against Cleanthes.

Demea reasons as follows:

This world is but a point in comparison of the universe; this life but a moment in comparison of eternity. The present evil phenomena, therefore, are rectified in other regions, and in some future period of existence. And the eyes of men, being then opened to larger views of things, see the whole connection of general laws, and trace, with adoration, the benevolence and rectitude of the Deity through all mazes and intricacies of his providence [p. 67].

It might be useful if we had a second statement of this theodicy, one taken from a traditional theological source. In Chapter LXXI of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, St. Thomas argues as follows:

The good of the whole is of more account than the good of the part. Therefore, it belongs to a prudent governor to overlook a lack of goodness in a part, that there may be an increase of goodness in the whole. Thus, the builder hides the foundation of a house underground, that the whole house may stand firm. Now, if evil were taken away from certain parts of the universe, the perfection of the universe would be much diminished, since its beauty results from the ordered unity of good and evil things, seeing that evil arises from the failure of good, and yet certain goods are occasioned from those very evils through the providence of the governor, even as the silent pause gives sweetness to the chant. Therefore, evil should not be excluded from things by the divine providence.

Neither of these statements seems entirely satisfactory. Demea might be suggesting that the world is good on the whole—that the suffering we discover in our world is, as it were, made up for in other regions of creation. God here appears as the husband who beats his wife on occasion but makes up for it with favors at other times. In St. Thomas' statement, there are unmistakable hints of causal reasoning. Certain goods are 'occasioned' by evils, as the foundation of the house permits the house to stand firm. But in both of these statements another theme occurs. Let me state it in my own way without pretense of historical accuracy.

I have a set of ten wooden blocks. There is a T-shaped block, an L-shaped block, an F-shaped block, and so on. No two blocks have the same shape. Let us assign each block a value—say an aesthetic value—making the T-shaped block most valuable and the L-shaped block least valuable. Now the blocks may be fitted together into formations. And let us suppose that the blocks are so shaped that there is one and only one subset of the blocks which will fit together into a square. The L-shaped block is a member of that subset. Further, let us stipulate that any formation of blocks (consisting of two or more blocks fitted together) will have more aesthetic value than any of the blocks taken individually or any subset of the blocks taken as a mere collection. And, as a last assumption, let us say that the square formation has greater aesthetic value than any other logically possible block formation. The L-shaped block is a necessary component of the square formation; that is, the L-shaped block is logically indispensable to the square formation. Thus the L-shaped block is a necessary component of the best of all possible block formations. Hence, the block with the least aesthetic value is logically indispensable to the best of all possible block formations. Without this very block, it would be logically impossible to create the best of all possible block formations.

Working from this model, let us understand Demea's theodicy as follows. Put aside the claim that instances of suffering are *de facto* causes or consequences of greater goods. God, being a perfectly good, omniscient, and omnipotent being, would create the best of all possible worlds. But the best of all possible worlds must contain instances of suffering: they are logically indispensable components. This is why there are instances of suffering in the world which God created.

What shall we say about this theodicy? Philo expresses no opinion on the subject.

Consider this reply to Demea's reasonings. A world containing instances of suffering as necessary components might be the best of all possible worlds. And if a world containing instances of suffering as necessary components were the best of all possible worlds, an omnipotent and omniscient being would have a morally sufficient reason for permitting instances of suffering. But how are we to know that, in fact, instances of suffering are logically indispensable components of the best of all possible worlds? There would appear to be no way of establishing this claim short of assuming that God does in fact exist and then concluding (as did Leibniz) that the world (containing suffering) which he did in fact create is the best of all possible worlds. But, this procedure assumes that God exists. And this latter is precisely the question now at issue.

It seems to me that this reply to Demea's theodicy has considerable

merit. First, my hypothetical objector is probably right in suggesting that the only way one could show that the best of all possible worlds must contain instances of suffering would be via the above argument in which the existence of God is assumed. Second, I think my objector is right in allowing that if instances of suffering were logically indispensable components of the best of all possible worlds, this would provide a morally sufficient reason for an omnipotent and omniscient being to permit instances of suffering. And, third, I think that my objector exhibits considerable discretion in not challenging the claim that the best of all possible worlds *might* contain instances of suffering as necessary components. I know of no argument which will show this claim to be true. But on the other hand, I know of no argument which will show this claim to be false. (I shall elaborate this last point directly.)

Thus, as I have said, the above evaluation of the theodicy advanced by Demea seems to have considerable merit. But this evaluation, *if correct*, seems to be sufficient to refute Philo's claim that 'God exists' and 'There occur instances of suffering' are logically incompatible statements. If instances of suffering were necessary components of the best of all possible worlds, then an omnipotent and omniscient being would have a morally sufficient reason for permitting instances of suffering. Thus, if it is *possible* that instances of suffering are necessary components of the best of all possible worlds, then there *might* be a morally sufficient reason for an omnipotent and omniscient being to permit instances of suffering. Thus if the statement 'Instances of suffering are necessary components of the best of all possible worlds' is not contradictory, then proposition (6) is not a necessary truth. And, as we have seen, if proposition (6) is not a necessary truth, then 'God exists' and 'There occur instances of suffering' are not logically incompatible statements.

What shall we say? Is the statement 'Instances of suffering are logically indispensable components of the best of all possible worlds' contradictory? That it is is simply assumed in Philo's first position. But, surely, this is not a trivial assumption. If it is correct, it must be shown to be so; it is not *obviously* correct. And how shall we argue that it is correct? Shall we, for example, assume that any case of suffering contained in any complex of events detracts from the value of the complex? If this principle were analytic, then a world containing an instance of suffering could not be the best of all possible worlds. But G. E. Moore has taught us to be suspicious of any such principle.¹⁵ And John Wisdom has provided a series of counterexamples which tend to show that this very principle is, in fact, not

¹⁵ I refer here to Moore's discussion of 'organic unities' in *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge, 1903), 28 ff.

analytic. Example: if I believe (rightly or wrongly) that you are in pain and become unhappy as a result of that belief. The resulting complex would appear to be better by virtue of my unhappiness (suffering) than it would have been had I believed you to be in pain but had not become unhappy (or had become happy) as a result.¹⁶ Philo's argument against the existence of God is not finished. And it is not at all obvious that it is *capable* of effective completion. It is, I submit, far from clear that God and evil could not exist together in the same universe.

PHILO'S SECOND POSITION

At the end of Part X, Philo agrees to 'retire' from his first position. He now concedes that 'God exists' and 'There occur instances of suffering' are not logically incompatible statements (p. 69). (It is clear from the context that this adjustment in Philo's thinking is made only for purposes of argument and not because Hume senses any inadequacy in Philo's first position.) Most contemporary philosophers think that Hume's major contribution to the literature on evil was made in Part X of the *Dialogues*. But it seems to me that what is of really lasting value in Hume's reflections on this subject is to be found not in Part X, but in the discussion in Part XI which follows Philo's 'retirement' from his first position.

(1) Consider, first of all, a theology in which the existence of God is accepted on the basis of what is taken to be a conclusive (*a priori*) demonstration. (A theology in which the existence of God is taken as an item of faith can be considered here as well.) On this view, that God exists is a settled matter, not subject to review or challenge. It is, as it were, axiomatic to further theological debate. According to Philo, evil in the world presents no special problem for a theology of this sort:

Let us allow that, if the goodness of the Deity (I mean a goodness like the human) could be established on any tolerable reasons *a priori*, these (evil) phenomena, however untoward, would not be sufficient to subvert that principle, but might easily, in some unknown manner, be reconcilable to it [p. 78].

This point, I think, is essentially correct, but it must be put more firmly.

Recalling the remarks advanced when discussing the inconsistent nature of propositions (4) through (6) above, a theologian who accepts the existence of God (either as an item of faith or on the basis of an *a priori* argument) must conclude either that there is some morally sufficient reason

¹⁶ 'God and Evil', *Mind*, 44 (1935), 13-14. I have modified Wisdom's example slightly.

for God's allowing suffering in the world, or that there are no instances of suffering in the world. He will, of course, choose the first alternative. Thus, in a theology of the sort now under consideration, the theologian begins by affirming the existence of God and by acknowledging the occurrence of suffering. It follows *logically* that God has some morally sufficient reason for allowing instances of suffering. The conclusion is not, as Philo suggests, that there *might* be a morally sufficient reason for evil. The conclusion is, rather, that there *must be* such a reason. It *could* not be otherwise.

What then of the traditional theological problem of evil? Within a theology of the above type, the problem of evil can only be the problem of discovering a *specific* theodicy which is adequate—that is, of discovering which, if any, of the specific proposals which might be advanced really describes God's morally sufficient reason for allowing instances of suffering. This problem, of course, is not a major one for the theologian. If the problem of evil is simply the problem of uncovering the specific reason for evil—given assurance that there is (and must be) some such reason—it can hardly be counted as a critical problem. Once it is granted that there is some specific reason for evil, there is a sense in which it is no longer vital to find it. A theologian of the type we are now considering might never arrive at a satisfactory theodicy. (Philo's 'unknown' reason might remain forever unknown.) He might condemn as erroneous all existing theodicies and might despair of ever discovering the morally sufficient reason in question. A charge of incompleteness would be the worst that could be leveled at his world view.

(2) Cleanthes is not, of course, a theologian of the sort just described. He does not accept the existence of God as an item of faith, nor on the basis of an *a priori* argument. In the *Dialogues*, Cleanthes supports his theological position with an *a posteriori* argument from design. He argues that 'order' in the universe provides sufficient evidence that the world was created by an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being.¹⁷ He proposes the existence of God as a quasi-scientific explanatory hypothesis, arguing its truth via the claim that it provides an adequate explanation for observed facts.

Philo has two comments to make regarding the relevance of suffering in the world for a theology of this kind.

¹⁷ It is interesting to notice that, in many cases, theologians who have used an argument from design have not attempted to argue that 'order' in the world proves the existence of a perfectly moral being. For example, in St. Thomas' 'fifth way' and in William Paley's *Natural Theology*, 'order' is used to show only that the creator of the world was *intelligent*. There are, however, historical instances of the argument from design being used to prove the goodness as well as the intelligence of a creator. For example, Bishop Berkeley argues this way in the second of the *Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*.

The first is a comment with which Philo is obviously well pleased. It is offered at the end of Part X and is repeated no less than three times in Part XI. It is this: even if the existence of God and the occurrence of suffering in the world are logically compatible, one cannot argue from a world containing suffering to the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good creator. This observation, I think all would agree, is correct. Given only a painting containing vast areas of green, one could not effectively argue that its creator disliked using green. There would be no *logical* conflict in holding that a painter who disliked using green painted a picture containing vast areas of green. But given *only* the picture (and no further information), the hypothesis that its creator disliked using green would be poorly supported indeed.

It is clear that in this first comment Philo has offered a criticism of Cleanthes' *argument* for the existence of God. He explicitly says that this complaint is against Cleanthes' *inference* from a world containing instances of suffering to the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good creator (p. 73). Philo's second comment, however, is more forceful than this. It is a challenge of the *truth* of Cleanthes' *hypothesis*.

Philo argues as follows:

Look round this universe. What an immense profusion of beings, animated and organized, sensible and active! You admire this prodigious variety and fecundity. But inspect a little more narrowly these living existences, the only beings worth regarding. How hostile and destructive to each other! How insufficient all of them for their own happiness! . . . There is indeed an opposition of pains and pleasures in the feelings of sensible creatures; but are not all the operations of nature carried on by an opposition of principles, of hot and cold, moist and dry, light and heavy! The true conclusion is that the original Source of all things is entirely indifferent to all these principles, and has no more regard to good above ill than to heat above cold, or to drought above moisture, or to light above heavy [p. 79].

Philo claims that *there is* an 'original Source of all things' and that this source is indifferent with respect to matters of good and evil. He pretends to be inferring this conclusion from observed data. This represents a departure from Philo's much professed skepticism in the *Dialogues*. And, no doubt, many of the criticisms of Cleanthes' position which Philo advanced earlier in the *Dialogues* would apply with equal force to the inference Philo has just offered. But I shall not dwell on this last point. I think the center of Philo's remarks in this passage must be located in their skeptical rather than their metaphysical import. Philo has proposed a hypothesis which is counter to the one offered by Cleanthes. And he claims that his hypothesis is the 'true conclusion' to be drawn from the observed data. But the point is not, I think, that Philo's new hypothesis is true, or even probable. The conclusion

is, rather, that the hypothesis advanced by Cleanthes is false, or very improbable. When claiming that evil in the world *supports* a hypothesis which is counter to the one offered by Cleanthes, I think Philo simply means to be calling attention to the fact that evil in the world provides *evidence against* Cleanthes' theological position.

Consider the following analogy which, I think, will help expose this point. I am given certain astronomical data. In order to explain the data, I introduce the hypothesis that there exists a planet which has not yet been observed but which will be observable at such and such a place in the sky at such and such a time. No other hypothesis seems as good. The anticipated hour arrives and the telescopes are trained on the designated area. No planet appears. Now, either one of two conclusions may be drawn. First, I might conclude that there is no planet there to be seen. This requires either that I reject the original astronomical data or that I admit that what seemed the best explanation of the data is not, in fact, the true explanation. Second, I might conclude that there is a planet there to be seen, but that something in the observational set-up went amiss. Perhaps the equipment was faulty, perhaps there were clouds, and so on. Which conclusion is correct? The answer is not straightforward. I must check both possibilities.

Suppose I find nothing in the observational set-up which is in the least out of order. My equipment is in good working condition, I find no clouds, and so on. To decide to retain the planet hypothesis in the face of the recalcitrant datum (my failure to observe the planet) is, in part, to decide that there is some circumstance (as yet unknown) which explains the datum *other* than the nonexistence of the planet in question. But a decision to retain the planet hypothesis (in the face of my failure to observe the planet and in the absence of an explicit explanation which 'squares' this failure with the planet hypothesis) is made correctly *only* when the *evidence for* the planet hypothesis is such as to render its negation less plausible than would be the assumption of a (as yet unknown) circumstance which explains the observation failure. This, I think, is part of the very notion of dealing reasonably with an explanatory hypothesis.

Now Cleanthes has introduced the claim that there exists an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being as a way of explaining 'order' in the world. And Philo, throughout the *Dialogues* (up to and including most of Part XI), has been concerned to show that this procedure provides very little (if any) solid evidence for the existence of God. The inference from the data to the hypothesis is extremely tenuous. Philo is now set for his final thrust at Cleanthes' position. Granting that God and evil are not logically incompatible, the existence of human suffering in the world must still be taken as a recalcitrant datum with respect to Cleanthes' hypothesis.

Suffering, as Philo says, is not what we should antecedently expect in a world created by an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being (pp. 71-2). Since Cleanthes has offered nothing in the way of an explicit theodicy (that is, an explanation of the recalcitrant datum which would 'square' it with his hypothesis) and since the *evidence* for his hypothesis is extremely weak and generally ineffective, there is pretty good reason for thinking that Cleanthes' hypothesis is false.

This, I think, is the skeptical import of Philo's closing remarks in Part XI. On this reading nothing is said about an 'original Source of all things' which is indifferent with respect to matters of good and evil. Philo is simply making clear the negative force of the fact of evil in the world for a hypothesis such as the one offered by Cleanthes.

It ought not to go unnoticed that Philo's closing attack on Cleanthes' position has extremely limited application. Evil in the world has central negative importance for theology only when theology is approached as a quasi-scientific subject, as by Cleanthes. That it is seldom approached in this way will be evident to anyone who has studied the history of theology. Within most theological positions, the existence of God is taken as an item of faith or embraced on the basis of an *a priori* argument. Under these circumstances, where there is nothing to qualify as a 'hypothesis' capable of having either negative or positive 'evidence', the fact of evil in the world presents no special problem for theology. As Philo himself has suggested, when the existence of God is accepted prior to any rational consideration of the status of evil in the world, the traditional problem of evil reduces to a noncrucial perplexity of relatively minor importance.

III

THE DEFEAT OF GOOD AND EVIL

RODERICK M. CHISHOLM

1. Looking for a topic that would be philosophically live, that would reflect my own interests, and that would be appropriate for the events of 1968, I kept coming back to the nature of evil. When the time came to submit a title, however, courage failed and I settled for 'The Types of Intrinsic Goodness and Badness'. Now I am able to compromise with 'The Defeat of Good and Evil'.

I shall discuss a distinction that seems to me to be of first importance to the theory of value. The distinction was seen by such theodacists as St. Thomas and Hume's Demea. It was seen more clearly by Leibniz in his *Theodicy* and by G. E. Moore in the first and last chapters of *Principia Ethica*. And now, I think, we are able to see the distinction more clearly still as a result of recent work in the logic of preference—the logic of such concepts as *good*, *bad*, and *better*.

The distinction may be put by contrasting what I shall call 'balancing off' and 'defeating'. It is one thing to say that the goodness—the intrinsic goodness—of a certain situation is *balanced off* by means of some other situation; and it is quite another thing to say that the goodness of a certain situation is *defeated* by means of some other situation. Again, it is one thing to say that the evil—the intrinsic badness—of a certain situation is balanced off by means of some other situation; and it is quite another thing to say that the evil of a certain situation is defeated by means of some other situation.

Before I try to define the distinction precisely, I shall make certain general points about the logic of the terms 'good', 'bad', and 'better', when these are used in connection with intrinsic value. I shall assume that we can know, with respect to some things, that those things are good in themselves; that we can know, with respect to other things, that those things are bad in themselves; that we can know, with respect to still other things, that those things are neither good nor bad in themselves; and that we can know, with

respect to many things, that some of them are better in themselves than others. I shall also assume that we all know what is meant by the expressions I have just used. These assumptions may themselves be worthy of discussion but they are not the topic of the present paper.

2. The word 'good', Aristotle said, is predicated in every category.¹ There is a sense in which we may say of a substance that it is good; there is a sense in which we may say of a quantity that it is good; and so, too, of a quality, a relation, a time, and a place. And similarly for 'bad'. But this is not true of the expressions 'intrinsically good' and 'intrinsically bad'—of 'good in itself' and 'bad in itself'.

Consider the things that are said to be intrinsically good or intrinsically bad. If we follow the great traditions in western philosophy, we could readily make two lists—a good list and a bad list. The good list, the list of those things that are intrinsically good, would include such items as these: happiness, love, knowledge, justice, beauty, proportion, good intention, and the exercise of virtue. The bad list, on the other hand, would include such items as these: displeasure, unhappiness, hate, ignorance, injustice, ugliness, disharmony, bad intention, and the exercise of vice. The things on the good list, one might say, are the sorts of things that ought to be. To the extent that they may be found in any possible world, that possible world could be said to rate a plus. The things that are on the bad list, one could then say, are the sorts of things that ought not to be. To the extent that *they* may be found in any possible world, *that* possible world rates a minus.

Without pausing to consider whether these lists are too long or too short, let us note one general point about all the items listed. The *terms* we have used in making up the lists are all abstract—'pleasure', 'displeasure', 'love', 'hate', 'the exercise of virtue', 'the exercise of vice', and so on. What these terms refer to are not individuals or concrete things or substances. They are rather propositional entities, or states of affairs: there being happy individuals or there being unhappy individuals; there being individuals experiencing pleasure or there being individuals experiencing displeasure; there being individuals exercising virtue or there being individuals exercising vice. The things that are intrinsically good and the things that are intrinsically bad are, all of them, states of affairs. We may also put this point by saying that states of affairs are the bearers of intrinsic value.

I am using the expression 'state of affairs' in the way in which Moore and Lewis used it—also, I think, in the way in which Frege used the word '*Gedanke*', in the way in which Meinong used the word '*Objektiv*', in the way in which Wittgenstein used '*Sachverhalt*', and in the way in which

¹ *Ethics*, i. 6.

Russell once used the word 'proposition'. I am assuming, therefore, that there *are* states of affairs, some of which obtain and some of which do not obtain. There being horses, for example, is one that does and there being unicorns is one that doesn't. In place of the verb 'obtains', we could use 'takes place', or 'occurs', or 'is actual', or even 'is true' or 'exists' (but if we use 'exists', then we should say 'There *are* states of affairs that do not exist' and not 'There *exist* states of affairs that do not exist'). I am also assuming that states of affairs stand in logical relations to other states of affairs; one state of affairs, for example, may be said to imply or entail another, and every state of affairs has a negation.

Perhaps we ought to say that the only bearers of intrinsic value are *actual* states of affairs—just those states of affairs that occur, obtain, or exist. Everyone being happy is not a state of affairs that obtains and therefore we are not likely to say of it that it *is* good. We would be more likely to say of it that it *would* be good if it *were* to obtain. We would not try to comfort a pessimistic hedonist by telling him that everyone being happy is something that is intrinsically good. Yet we may say of it that it *is* such that it ought to be, just as we may say of everyone being unhappy that it *is* such that it ought not to be. And it is a useful shorthand to say, of nonactual as well as of actual states of affairs, that they *are* good, or bad, or neutral. It is also a useful shorthand to say, of nonactual states of affairs, that some of them *are* better, intrinsically, than others, rather than saying, more clumsily, that some of them are such that they *would* be better than others if only they were to exist.

A state of affairs is not intrinsically good unless it entails one of those states of affairs that are on our good list—unless it entails, for example, that there are individuals experiencing pleasure or that there are individuals behaving virtuously. A state of affairs is not intrinsically bad unless it entails one of those states of affairs that are on our bad list—unless it entails, for example, that there are individuals experiencing displeasure or that there are individuals behaving wickedly. These facts have a very important consequence which, I believe, has not been sufficiently noticed.

The negation of a state of affairs that is intrinsically good will not be a state of affairs that is intrinsically bad, and the negation of a state of affairs that is intrinsically bad will not be a state of affairs that is intrinsically good. There being happy Mexicans and there being Romans who are behaving virtuously are states of affairs that are intrinsically good. But their negations—there not being happy Mexicans and there not being Romans who are behaving virtuously—are not intrinsically bad, for they do not entail the existence of any of the items on our bad list. There not being happy Mexicans, of course, is very different from there being unhappy Mexicans,

and there not being Romans who are behaving virtuously is very different from there being Romans who are behaving wickedly. On the other hand, there being unhappy Mexicans and there being Romans who are behaving wickedly *are* states of affairs that are intrinsically bad. And *their* negations—there not being unhappy Mexicans and there not being Romans who are behaving wickedly—are *not* intrinsically good, for they do not entail the existence of any of the items on our good list.

Good states of affairs and bad states of affairs, then, have this feature in common: they have neutral negations, negations that are neither good nor bad. I have used the word 'neutral' and not 'indifferent', since, if we take the word 'indifferent' in one of its familiar philosophical senses, we must distinguish what is intrinsically neutral—that is to say, neither good nor bad—from what is intrinsically indifferent. An indifferent state of affairs, in this familiar sense, would be a state of affairs having the same value as its negation—a state of affairs such that it is no better than its negation and its negation is no better than it. There being stones, for example, whatever its instrumental value may be in this world, is intrinsically indifferent. So far as intrinsic value is concerned, there being stones is no better than there not being stones, and there not being stones is no better than there being stones. But the negations of states of affairs that are good and the negations of states of affairs that are bad, though they are themselves neither good nor bad, are not thus indifferent. For *they* differ in value from their negations. All indifferent states of affairs, therefore, are neutral, but not all neutral states of affairs are indifferent. And though we may say that every state of affairs is good, bad, or neutral, we may not say that every state of affairs is good, bad, or indifferent; for the negations of states of affairs that are good and the negations of states of affairs that are bad are states of affairs that are neither good, bad, nor indifferent.

Professor Sosa and I have worked out what we take to be the proper logic of these concepts and we have suggested how to define them all in terms of the relation of being intrinsically better. The gist of what we have said is this: Two states of affairs may be said to be the *same in value* if neither one is better than the other. An *indifferent* state of affairs, as just noted, is one that is the same in value as its negation. A *neutral* state of affairs, on the other hand, is one that is the same in value as some state of affairs that is indifferent. A *good* state of affairs is one that is better than some state of affairs that is indifferent. And a *bad* state of affairs is one such that some state of affairs that is indifferent is better than it. We have assumed, of course, that the relation of being intrinsically better is one that is asymmetric and transitive. And we have also assumed the following: that all indifferent states of affairs are the same in value; that all good states of affairs are

better than their negations; and that all bad states of affairs are worse than their negations.²

With these simple points in mind, let us now turn to the difference between balancing off and defeat.

3. Balancing off is clear enough, but let us be explicit so that we may contrast it with defeat. Suppose there is one man, Mr. Jones, experiencing a certain amount of innocent pleasure and there is another man, Mr. Smith, experiencing that same amount of innocent displeasure; Mr. Smith is just as displeased as Mr. Jones is pleased. Given a theory of value such as Jeremy Bentham's, we could say that, since the amount of goodness in this conjunctive state of affairs is the same as the amount of badness, therefore the positive and negative values *counterbalance* each other. If the positive and negative values thus counterbalance each other, then the total state of affairs—Mr. Jones in his innocent pleasure and Mr. Smith in his innocent displeasure—is one that is neutral in value. If we think of the total conjunctive state of affairs as being a whole and of its conjuncts as being proper parts, we could say that one of the parts is better than the whole and that another of the parts is worse than the whole.

Or consider that whole which is Mr. Jones experiencing a certain amount of pleasure and Mr. Robinson experiencing a greater amount of displeasure. Applying Bentham's principles to this case, we could say that the whole is bad inasmuch as the goodness of one of its parts is *outweighed* by the badness of another one of its parts. Here, too, one of the parts is better than the whole. And here, too, the whole, though bad, is better than one of its parts. The whole is worse than its good part and better than its worst part. For that state of affairs which is Jones experiencing a certain amount of pleasure and Robinson experiencing a greater amount of displeasure, though bad, is not as bad as that part which is Robinson experiencing that greater amount of displeasure.

And so it is easy to say what it is for goodness to be balanced off. There will be a whole with a good part and a bad part; these parts will exclude each

² See Roderick M. Chisholm and Ernest Sosa, 'On the Logic of "Intrinsically better"', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 3 (1966), 244-9. We set forth a 'value calculus' with the following axioms, reading 'pPq' as 'p is intrinsically better than q':

- (A1) $(p)(q)[pPq \supset \sim(qPp)]$
- (A2) $(p)(q)(r)[\sim(pPq) \& \sim(qPr) \supset \sim(pPr)]$
- (A3) $(p)(q)[\sim(pP\sim p) \& \sim(\sim pPp) \& \sim(qP\sim q) \& \sim(\sim qPq) \supset \sim(pPq) \& \sim(qPp)]$
- (A4) $(p)[(q)[\sim(pP\sim q) \& \sim(\sim qPp)] \supset pPq] \supset pP\sim p$
- (A5) $(p)[(q)[\sim(qP\sim q) \& \sim(\sim qPq)] \supset qP\sim p] \supset pP\sim p$

I now believe the following axioms should have been added:

- (A6) $(p)(q)(r)[(pvq)Pr \supset (pPrvqPr)]$
- (A7) $(p)(q)(r)[pP(qvr) \supset (pPqvpr)]$

other (neither one will entail the other); the whole itself will not be good, but it will be better than one of its parts. Actually, we needn't even say that the whole has a bad part; for if a whole is not good and is better than one of its parts, then the part that it is better than will be a part that is bad.³ If the whole is neutral, then the goodness of the part will be counterbalanced; if the whole is bad, then the goodness of the part will be outweighed.

We may put the matter pedantically by saying that the *goodness* of a state of affairs *p* is *balanced off* by a wider state of affairs *q* provided that the following is true: *q* obtains; *q* entails *p*; *p* is good; *q* is not good; and *q* entails a state of affairs *r* such that *p* does not entail *r*, *r* does not entail *p*, and *q* is better than *r*. But it is simpler to say that when goodness is balanced off, then a whole that is not good has a part that is good, and, outside of it, a part that is worse than the whole.

When goodness is thus balanced off, we may be consoled at least by *its* presence in the larger whole.

The balancing off of evil is, of course, analogous. There will be a whole with a good part and a bad part; these parts will exclude each other; the whole itself will not be bad; but it will be worse than its good part. We needn't say, however, that the whole has a good part; for if a whole is not bad and is worse than one of its parts, then the part that it is worse than will be a part that is good. If the whole is neutral, then the badness of the part will be counterbalanced; if the whole is good, then the badness of the part will be outweighed.

We may put the matter pedantically by saying that the *badness* of a state of affairs *p* is *balanced off* by a wider state of affairs *q* provided that the following is true: *q* obtains; *q* entails *p*; *p* is bad; *q* is not bad; and *q* entails a state of affairs *r* such that *p* does not entail *r*, *r* does not entail *p*, and *r* is better than *q*.⁴ But it is simpler to say that when evil is balanced off, then a whole that is not bad has a part that is bad and, outside of it, a part that is better than the whole.

When evil is balanced off, we may yet regret or resent *its* presence in the larger whole.

4. Now let us contrast *defeat* with balancing off. I shall first cite a number of examples, beginning with what Brentano called 'pleasure in the bad'.

³ That this is so follows from the axioms and definitions of the value calculus referred to in the previous footnote.

⁴ If, in our definition of the balancing off of goodness, we replace 'q is not good' and 'q is better than r', respectively, by 'p is better than q' and 'r is bad', we obtain a definition of the more general concept of the *partial balancing off of goodness*. And if, in our definition of the balancing off of evil, we replace 'q is not bad' and 'r is better than q', respectively, by 'q is better than p' and 'r is good', we obtain a definition of the more general concept of the *partial balancing off of evil*. Just as we may contrast balancing off with defeat, we may also contrast partial balancing off with partial defeat.

Consider the sentence: 'Jones is pleased that Smith is displeased.' We may suppose that Smith being displeased is a state of affairs that is bad. Hence the sentence tells us, with respect to a certain state of affairs that is bad, that that state of affairs is the intentional object of Jones's pleasure. Let us interpret our sentence in such a way that it tells us that Smith's displeasure is, *as such*, the object of Jones's pleasure. That is to say, Jones relishes or savors Smith's displeasure in itself, so to speak, and not in virtue of, or merely in virtue of, what he takes to be its consequences. And refining to a certain extent upon ordinary language, let us so interpret 'Jones is pleased that Smith is displeased' that it does not imply that Smith is, in fact, displeased. Jones may be pleased, for all we know, about what he mistakenly thinks to be the fact that Smith is displeased.

We understand 'pleasure in the bad', then, in such a way that we may say: first, that the intentional object of such pleasure is a state of affairs that is bad; secondly, that the pleasure is directed upon this state of affairs itself and not upon what are taken to be its consequences; and, thirdly, that the pleasure may be 'illusory' or 'unveridical'—that is to say, its intentional object may in fact be a state of affairs that does not obtain.

Pleasure in the bad is certainly an unseemly emotion. One might say, as Brentano did, that 'pleasure in the bad is, as pleasure, something that is good, but at the same time, as an incorrect emotion, it is something that is bad'.⁵ We may have our example, however, without being this rigid in our ethics. Let us suppose, for the moment, that pleasure in the bad, to the extent that it is pleasure, is good, and to the extent that it is pleasure in the bad, is neither good nor bad. Now we consider the state of affairs expressed by the sentence, 'Jones is pleased that Smith is displeased.' The state of affairs itself is neutral; it is neither good nor bad. It entails a state of affairs that is good; for it entails that Jones is pleased. It does not entail any state of affairs that is bad. (We are assuming, it will be recalled, that Jones's unseemly pleasure over Smith's displeasure may be illusory or unveridical. It may be that Smith is not displeased at all.) And, finally, this neutral state of affairs—Jones being pleased that Smith is displeased—does not entail any state of affairs that is worse than it is. Hence we cannot say that the goodness of Jones being pleased is in any way *balanced off* in the larger neutral situation that entails it. For the larger situation does not entail any *bad* state of affairs which outweighs or counterbalances the goodness of Jones being pleased. But, if the example is acceptable, we may say that the

⁵ Franz Brentano, *The Origin of our Knowledge of Right and Wrong* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), translated by Roderick M. Chisholm and Elizabeth Schneewind; p. 90. Compare p. 115 n.

goodness of Jones being pleased is *defeated* by the wider state of affairs that entails it.

If pleasure in the bad illustrates the defeat of goodness, then displeasure in the bad may illustrate the defeat of badness. Consider what St. Thomas says about righteous indignation. He defines the righteously indignant man as one who is 'saddened at the prosperity of the wicked'.⁶ But let us modify his definition slightly and say that the righteously indignant man is one who is saddened at what he takes to be the prosperity of the wicked. That he takes the wicked to be prospering, one might say, is a state of affairs that is itself neither good nor bad. That he is saddened is a state of affairs that is bad. But that he is saddened at what he takes to be the prosperity of the wicked, is, according to St. Thomas, a state of affairs that is good, or, at any rate, not a state of affairs that is bad.

Or consider these types of feeling—pleasure in the bad and displeasure in the bad—when the intentional object that is bad is one's own wicked deed instead of the displeasure of another. Contemplation of what I take to be a previous misdeed of mine might be said to be a state of affairs that is neutral. If now we add to it that *good* state which is my taking pleasure in the object of my contemplation, then, some would be tempted to say, the resulting whole becomes *worse* instead of better. And so, if this is true, then, by adding a state of affairs that is good to a state of affairs that is neutral, we obtain a state of affairs that is bad.

Or suppose, again, that the added state is one of displeasure instead of pleasure. We have, as before, my contemplation of what I take to be my previous misdeed and this contemplation is ethically neutral. But now we add to it that *bad* state which is my taking displeasure in the object of my contemplation. Then the result, some will be tempted to say, is the virtuous activity of repentance and therefore the resulting whole is *better* because of the component that is bad. If this is true, then, by adding a state of affairs that is bad to a state of affairs that is neutral, we obtain a state of affairs that is good.

Let us add three further examples—two of them being very familiar.

The unpleasant experience of fear, we may suppose, is a state of affairs that is intrinsically bad. But such experience is necessarily involved in the exercise of courage. And the exercise of courage, we may further suppose, is a virtuous activity that is intrinsically good. We need not pause to consider what else it is that goes with fear to make up courage. For the point of the present example is that the larger whole—the exercise of courage—is *better* intrinsically because of the badness of the part that is bad.

⁶ St. Thomas, *Commentary on the Nichomachean Ethics*, Para. 356. See Aristotle's *Ethics*, bk. ii, ch. 7, 1108b.

A certain combination of parts may be ugly. This combination may be entailed by a larger whole that is not ugly or that is even beautiful. And the larger whole may be preferable aesthetically just because of the ugliness of the part that is ugly.

I have said that, when evil is *balanced off* in a larger whole, we may, when considering the larger whole, regret or resent the presence of the evil there. But if these examples are acceptable, then one should say 'Thank goodness for the badness of the part that is bad!' For in each case the badness of the part that is bad makes the whole *better* than what we would have had had the bad part been replaced by its neutral negation.

Finally, consider there being one wicked man and many men who are good. Presumably this state of affairs is one that is neutral or possibly even one that is good. Now consider there being one man who feels pleasure and many men who do not. Here we seem to have a state of affairs that is good—for we are saying of the many men, not that they are in a state of displeasure, but only that they are not in a state of pleasure. And now let us add these two states of affairs together, letting the wicked man be the one who experiences the pleasure and the many good men the ones who do not. I think one may well be tempted to say that this combination of a neutral state of affairs with one that is good results in a whole that is neutral. Here, then, we would have the defeat of goodness. We have a whole that is *worse* for the presence of a part that is good. Contemplating such a whole, we might well regret or resent the presence of the goodness there. For the goodness of the part that is good makes the whole worse than what we would have had had only the good part been replaced by its neutral negation.⁷

5. Let us now try to characterize *defeat* more formally.

We must first say what is meant by a 'part of a state of affairs':

(D1) p is part of a state of affairs $q =_{Df}$ q is necessarily such that (a) if it obtains then p obtains and (b) whoever conceives it conceives p .

We will next summarize our contrast between defeat and balancing off. And then we will set forth some definitions.

When goodness is balanced off, then a whole that is not good has a part

⁷ The following example is proposed by John Wisdom. Friendship is good; that is to say, two people standing in the relation of friendship to each other is good. Friendship is better for the exercise of tolerance, understanding, and forgiveness. But the exercise of tolerance, understanding, and forgiveness requires the existence of pain and sorrow. And the existence of pain and sorrow is intrinsically bad. Wisdom suggests there could not be 'sorrowing affection without pain nor lamenting affection without degradation'. And the important point is, he realizes, not merely that joint sufferings 'tend under certain circumstances to *cause* greater affection'; it is, rather, that a state of friendship that includes this evil is better, in itself, than one that does not. See John Wisdom, 'God and Evil', *Mind*, 44 (1935), 1–20; the quotations are from p. 19.

that is good and, outside of that part, a part that is worse than the whole itself. When goodness is defeated in a larger whole, then that whole does not thus contain any part that is worse than the whole. We may characterize the *defeat of goodness* this way:

- (D2) Some of the goodness of state of affairs p is defeated by $q =_{Df}$ p is a good part of q and better than q ; and if q has a bad part that is worse than q , then that bad part is a part of p
- (D3) The goodness of p is partially defeated by $q =_{Df}$ Some of the goodness of p is defeated by q , and q is good
- (D4) The goodness of p is totally defeated by $q =_{Df}$ Some of the goodness of p is defeated by q , and q is not good.

And so when the goodness of p is defeated by such a larger whole, it will not be the case that the goodness of p is balanced off by that larger whole; we will not find elsewhere in the whole a part that is worse than the whole. When goodness is balanced off, and not defeated, by a whole that is bad, then we may be consoled at least by the presence of the part that is good. But if goodness is ever defeated by a whole that is bad, then we may well regret or resent the presence of the part that is good.

Analogously, when evil is balanced off, then a whole that is not bad has a part that is bad and, outside of that part, a part that is better than the whole itself. But when evil is defeated by a larger whole, then that whole does not contain any part that is better than the whole. We will characterize the *defeat of evil* this way:

- (D5) Some of the evil of state of affairs p is defeated by $q =_{Df}$ p is a bad part of q and worse than q ; and if q has a good part that is better than q , then that good part is part of p
- (D6) The evil of p is partially defeated by $q =_{Df}$ Some of the evil of p is defeated by q , and q is bad
- (D7) The evil of p is totally defeated by $q =_{Df}$ Some of the evil of p is defeated by q , and q is not bad

And so when the evil of p is defeated by such a larger whole, it will not be the case that the evil of p is balanced off by that whole; we will not find elsewhere in the whole a part that is better than the whole. When evil is merely balanced off, and not defeated, by a whole that is good, then one may regret or resent its presence in that whole. But if evil is ever defeated by a whole that is good, then, as I have suggested, we may well be thankful for the very part that is bad.

I would say, then, that the *concept* of defeat is entirely clear. It may well be that the examples I have given are not entirely plausible. It may even be, as some will doubtless urge, that the concept is not exemplified at all.

Nevertheless I think the concept is of fundamental importance to the theory of value. Let us consider some of its applications.

6. We may now distinguish several different types of intrinsic goodness and intrinsic badness.

Consider a state of affairs that is intrinsically good. We may ask whether that state of affairs is defeasibly good or indefeasibly good. It will be *defeasibly good* if there is a wider state of affairs by which its goodness would be defeated. It will be *indefeasibly good* if there is no wider state of affairs by which its goodness would be defeated.

Consider, once again, Jones being pleased. According to Bentham's principles, this state of affairs would be indefeasibly good; although there are wider states of affairs in which its goodness would be balanced off, there are no wider states of affairs by which its goodness would be defeated. But according to certain other ethical views, the goodness of Jones being pleased is defeasible and it would in fact be defeated if Jones's pleasure were pleasure in the bad.

We should note that it is one thing to say that Jones's pleasure is only defeasibly good and it is another thing to say that its goodness has in fact been *defeated*. The goodness of his pleasure may be defeasible, since, let us suppose, it would be defeated if the pleasure were pleasure in the bad. But what if his pleasure is not pleasure in the bad? In this case, it may be that, though the goodness of his pleasure is defeasible, it is not in fact defeated.

What, then, of pleasure in the good? Suppose Jones is taking pleasure in Smith's innocent pleasure in the neutral—in Smith's innocent pleasure, say, in the being of stones. Shall we say that the goodness of this pleasure in the good is indefeasible? Kant would not agree. For what if Jones's pleasure were undeserved? Let Jones's pleasure in the good, then, be pleasure that is deserved. Here, surely, we have a state of affairs that is indefeasibly good. Though there are wider states of affairs in which its goodness would be balanced off, there are no wider states of affairs in which its goodness would be defeated.

Hence, with respect to states of affairs that are good, we may distinguish between those that are defeasibly good and those that are indefeasibly good. Then, with respect to those states of affairs that are defeasibly good and are also actual, those defeasibly good states of affairs that actually obtain, we may distinguish between those which are such that their goodness is in fact defeated and those which are such that their goodness is not in fact defeated. We may also distinguish between those which are such that their goodness is known to be defeated and those which are such that their goodness is not known to be defeated. (Hence we may provide a variety of possible uses for the technical philosophical expression, '*prima facie* good'.

We could say that a *prima facie* good is a good that is defeasible; or we could say that it is a good that is in fact defeated; or we could say that it is a good that is defeasible and not known to be defeated.)

What we have been saying holds, *mutatis mutandis*, of evil. With respect to states of affairs that are bad, we may distinguish between those that are defeasibly bad and those that are indefeasibly bad. Then with respect to those states of affairs that are defeasibly bad and also actual, we may distinguish between those which are such that their badness has in fact been defeated and those which are such that their badness has not in fact been defeated. And we may distinguish between those which are such that their badness is known to be defeated and those which are such that their badness is not known to be defeated. (We could then provide analogous uses for '*prima facie* evil.' We could say that a *prima facie* evil is an evil that is defeasible, or that it is an evil that has in fact been defeated, or that it is an evil that is defeasible and not known to be defeated.)

Let us note in passing that it is now possible to distinguish still other types of intrinsic goodness and badness.

We could say, for example, that a state of affairs *p* is *absolutely good* provided, first, that *p* is good and provided, further, that *any* possible state of affairs entailing *p* is better than any possible state of affairs not entailing *p*, no matter how good or bad the other constituents of those states of affairs may happen to be.⁸ Thus Pascal seems to have held that the existence of living things is such an absolute good: a world in which there is life, no matter how it is otherwise constituted, is one that is good and one that is better than any world in which there is no life.

Absolute evil would be analogous. A state of affairs *p* is *absolutely bad* provided that *p* is bad and provided that any possible state of affairs entailing *p* is worse than any possible state of affairs not entailing *p*. Thus Schopenhauer seems to have held that the existence of suffering is such an absolute evil: *any* world in which there is suffering is one such that 'its nonexistence would be preferable to its existence'.⁹

One could move on to greater heights, and depths. Thus there is, or may be, that which is not only absolutely good but also *diffusively good*. A state of affairs *p* is diffusively good if *p* is good and if any logically possible state of affairs containing *p* is also good. Hence if a state of affairs is diffusively

⁸ In *The Logic of Preference* (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1963), G. H. von Wright envisages the possibility that a person 'actually welcomes a change to *p* & *-q* more than a change to *-p* and *q*, irrespective of all other changes which may simultaneously happen to the world', and says 'if this is the case, I shall say that he prefers *p* to *q* *absolutely*' (p. 29).

⁹ See 'On the Vanity and Suffering of Life', in the Supplements to the Fourth Book of *The World as Will and Idea*.

good, it is not only indefeasibly good but it is also such that its goodness cannot be balanced off. Analogously, a state of affairs *p* is *diffusively bad* if *p* is bad and if any logically possible state of affairs containing *p* is also bad. Hence if a state of affairs *p* is diffusively bad, it is not only indefeasibly bad but it is also such that its badness cannot be balanced off.

I confess, however, that such distinctions as these are not likely to be of much use to most of us.

7. Before turning to theodicy, let us make certain general points about our *knowledge* of value and of defeat and defeasibility.

Propositions about *instrumental* value are, of course, *a posteriori* and contingent. To know with respect to some state of affairs that it is 'good as a means', or that it is 'bad as a means', is to *know* something about its causal properties; it is to know something about those states of affairs that would obtain as a result of its obtaining. What is instrumentally good on one occasion may be instrumentally neutral, or instrumentally bad, on another occasion.

Where knowledge of the instrumental value of a state of affairs thus involves knowledge of its *causal* properties, knowledge of the *intrinsic* value of a state of affairs may be likened to knowledge of its logical properties. For statements or propositions about intrinsic value may be said to hold in every possible world and therefore they may be thought of as being necessary. If pleasure is intrinsically good in this world, then it would be intrinsically good in any world in which it might be found. And if pleasure in the bad is intrinsically bad in this world, then it would be intrinsically bad in any world in which it might be found. Hence the kind of knowledge we have of intrinsic value is properly said to be *a priori*.

Statements or propositions about the defeasibility of value will also be necessary and *a priori*. But statements or propositions about defeat, as distinguished from defeasibility, are *a posteriori* and contingent. For to know that the value of a given state of affairs is actually defeated is to know, with respect to some state of affairs which would defeat its value, that that state of affairs in fact obtains.

There is no absurdity in supposing that a rational man might know *a priori*, with respect to some state of affairs *p*, that *p* is good, or that *p* is bad, and yet *not* know whether the value of *p* is defeasible. He might even believe, mistakenly, that the value of *p* is indefeasible. This could happen if every state of affairs *q*, such that *q* would defeat the value of *p*, were a state of affairs that he had never even conceived. Suppose, for example, that the goodness of pleasure would be defeated by the pleasure's being undeserved but otherwise not. And suppose there were a man who knew what pleasure is but who didn't know what it is to deserve anything or what it is not to

deserve anything. Then he might know that pleasure is intrinsically good and believe, mistakenly, that it is also indefeasibly good.

Hence a reasonable man may be *dogmatic* with respect to questions of intrinsic value ('Is *p* a state of affairs that is intrinsically good?') and *agnostic* with respect to questions of defeasibility ('Is the goodness of *p* defeasible?'). If he conceives of some state of affairs *q* such that *q* would defeat the value of *p*, then, of course, he may be dogmatic with respect to the defeasibility of *p*. But if he does not conceive of any state of affairs *q* such that *q* would defeat the value of *p*, he may well withhold judgment about the indefeasibility of *p*. To know that the value of *p* is indefeasible, one needs to know that there is *no* state of affairs *q* such that *q* would defeat the value of *p*. Hence one would have to consider, for *every* possible state of affairs *q*, just what the total value of *p* and *q* would be. And this is hardly possible.

These epistemological observations have one important consequence. There is doubtless a temptation to say that a defeated good is not a good at all and thus to restrict the term 'good' to what I have called indefeasible goods. If we were thus to restrict our use of 'good', we would also restrict our use of 'evil', confining it to those things that are indefeasible evils.¹⁰ Now if the only things that are really good or bad are just those things that I have called indefeasibly good or indefeasibly bad, and if we can never know, with respect to any state of affairs, that that state of affairs is indefeasibly good or indefeasibly bad, then it will follow that we cannot know, with respect to any state of affairs at all, that the state of affairs is good or that that state of affairs is bad. And this is an extreme that most of us would be unwilling to accept.

8. Finally, I shall make some brief observations about theodicy. For the concept of defeat has obvious application to the problem of evil.

We may assume that if an omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent deity were to create a world, then that world would be at least as good as any other possible world. The total state of affairs which would make up such a world would be at least as good as any other possible set of states of affairs that would make up a world. We encounter the problem of evil when we try to answer the simple question: 'Is it possible for a world that is at least as

¹⁰ Although, as I have said, St. Thomas seems to be aware of the concept of defeat (see *Summa Theologica*, i. 48. 2), he is also inclined to say, at times, that defeated goods and evils are not goods and evils at all. Thus he says: 'Initially and without qualification something may be judged to be good or evil, yet this decision may have to be reversed when additional circumstances are taken into account' (i. 19. 6); and '... something may be good according to a particular judgment which is not good according to a wider judgment, and conversely ...' (i-ii. 19. 10). Contrast G. E. Moore: 'The part of a valuable whole retains exactly the same value when it is, as when it is not, a part of that whole'; *Principia Ethica*, p. 30.

good as any other logically possible world to include any states of affairs that are intrinsically bad?

Perhaps we should remind ourselves that it would not be possible for there to be a world containing only states of affairs that are intrinsically good. For every state of affairs is such that every possible world contains either it or its negation. But some states of affairs—there being stones, once again—are intrinsically indifferent and therefore such that both they and their negations are neutral. Therefore every possible world will contain some states of affairs that are intrinsically neutral. Moreover, every bad state of affairs and every good state of affairs is a state of affairs such that its negation is neutral. Hence, for every evil as well as every good, that is *excluded* from a world that is good, that world will include its neutral negation.

Perhaps we should also note that, if God does not create all, he will still function as a *causa deficiens*. For there will then be certain neutral states of affairs—the non-existence of stones as well as the non-existence of the various goods and evils we have discussed—which he will thereby *allow* to exist.

I have said we encounter the problem of evil when we consider the question: 'Is it possible for a world that is at least as good as any other possible world to include any states of affairs that are intrinsically bad?' There is an impressive list of philosophers who seem to believe, not only that the answer to this question is negative, but also that it is very obviously negative.¹¹ Yet if what I have said about defeat is correct, then the answer to this question is at least not *obviously* negative. For it would seem that a world that is at least as good as any other possible world could contain states of affairs that are intrinsically bad—provided that the badness of each of these states of affairs is defeated.

What if the evils of the world were defeated by some wider state of affairs that is *absolutely good* in the sense we have defined—what if the evils of the world were defeated by a certain state of affairs *q* such that *q* is good and such that any possible state of affairs entailing *q* is better than any possible state of affairs not entailing *q*? Epicurus said that if God is able but unwilling to *prevent* evil, then he is malevolent. But if the evil in the world is defeated and contained in a larger whole that is absolutely good, one should rather say that, if God had been able but unwilling to *create* such evil, then he would have been malevolent. (What, though, if there were a possible world having the same value as this one but containing no evil? One is

¹¹ For example: John Stuart Mill, F. H. Bradley, J. M. E. McTaggart, C. J. Ducasse, Henry Aiken, Antony Flew, J. L. Mackie, H. J. McCloskey, and W. T. Stacc. See the references in Nelson Pike's anthology, *God and Evil* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 86–7.

tempted to say that God should have created that world instead of this one. But why so, if this one is just as good? Creation of the other world, one might say, would be very much like an act of supererogation.)

It is clear, I think, that this is the sort of thing that has been intended by the great theodiscists in the history of western thought. It is also clear, I think, that the theodiscist *must* appeal to the concept of defeat—that he can deal with the problem of evil *only* by saying that the evils in the world are defeated in the sense that I have tried to describe.¹² The other familiar moves just don't work at all.

But we must not let the theodiscist have the last word—not this year anyway.

What possible state of affairs *could* thus serve to defeat the evil that is in the world? The wise theodiscist, I should think, would say that he doesn't know. Is it at least *logically* possible with respect to the evil that does exist that that evil is defeated? The most the theodiscist has a right to say, I believe, is that it is *epistemically* possible. It may be, for all we know, that the evil in the world is defeated by some state of affairs that is absolutely good. And it may also be, for all we know, that the goodness in the world is defeated by some state of affairs that is absolutely evil.

¹² Discussing some unpublished statements of mine on this problem, Terence Penelhum writes: 'Chisholm's suggestion that a theist can hold that every evil is defeated without claiming to know by what, must contend with the fact that in a given form of theism the range of possible defeating factors may be specifically understood and incorporated in its moral requirements.' See Terence Penelhum, 'Divine Goodness and the Problem of Evil', *Religious Studies*, 2 (1966–7), 95–107 [Chapter IV in this collection]; the quotation is on p. 107, [p. 82 below]. Many theists, I would think, could accept the epistemological point made above—namely, that a reasonable man may be dogmatic with respect to questions of intrinsic value and at the same time agnostic with respect to questions of defeasibility.